DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 371 635 FL 022 291

AUTHOR Lanning, Kristina
TITLE Understanding Sri Lanka: A Cultural Examination Handbook for Peace Corps Volunteers.
PUB DATE Jun 94
NOTE 30p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Standards; Conflict Resolution; *Cultural Awareness; Cultural Context; Cultural Traits; Culture Conflict; Foreign Countries; *Hygiene; Intercultural Communication; *Interpersonal Communication; Travel; Volunteer Training; *Work Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS Peace Corps; *Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT

The handbook is designed to help Peace Corps volunteers in Sri Lanka examine and understand the culture of that country. It looks at five general areas of culture relevant to everyday living (personal appearance, social invitations, work attitudes and relationships, interpersonal interaction and communication, and harassment) and analyzes them from four perspectives: the significant features or standards; practical ways to adjust one's own behavior; using observation of cultural similarities and differences to make inferences; and examining one's own standards and preferences. The first two perspectives are addressed with narrative explanation; the last two are offered in the form of questions. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 371 635

Understanding Sri Lanka

A cultural examination handbook for Peace Corps Volunteers

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

By Kristina Lanning
PCV - Sri Lanka 1990-1992
School for International Training

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Kristina Lanning
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

FL022071

ABSTRACT

This cultural examination handbook is designed to help Peace Corps volunteers understand more than just the facts of Sri Lankan culture. This is done by taking a topic such as "appearance" and analyzing it according to four things - 1) what is appropriate, 2) how to accomplish appropriate behavior and then offering study questions that allow the reader to 3) examine why they think these customs exist and 4) how this fits with their own personal and American values. The topics covered in the handbook were chosen to represent situations that Peace Corps volunteers most commonly encounter, but they are relevant to anyone who will be living outside of the capital and wishes to immerse themselves in the culture. The topics covered include, Appearance, Invitations, Work Attitudes, Behavior, and Harassment. This handbook was written by a former Sri Lanka - Peace Corps Volunteer (1990-1992) and relies heavily on personal experience and discovery.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page Number

Chapter One: Introduction..... 3

Chapter Two: Appearance..... 5

Chapter Three: Invitations..... 10

Chapter Four: Work Attitudes..... 14

Chapter Five: Behavior..... 18

Chapter Six: Harassment..... 23

Chapter Seven: Conclusion..... 27

Readings..... 28

Chapter One

Introduction

As I looked around the empty room with my bags piled in the corner, I was overcome with emotion. I couldn't believe I was finally leaving Sri Lanka - my second home. During my two year service in Peace Corps, (1990-1992) I gained a great appreciation and love for this enchanting country. This is not to say that I was ecstatically happy every second of my time there. But after two years, Sri Lanka and its people had become ingrained in my heart. I asked myself, "How did this happen?" I thought of the smiling faces of my students, the generosity of the Sri Lankans I knew, the laughter I shared and (at times), my tears of frustration. My Sri Lankan friends offered a gentleness and generosity that was unique and refreshing. I looked at the new volunteers that had just arrived in the country. They had so many questions and concerns. I thought, "Was I like that too? Will they love this country as much as I do? How did I come to know Sri Lanka so well? How did I learn all the nuances and intricacies of everyday Sri Lankan life?" I could not think of a specific time when learning occurred. It seems that getting to know a new culture is rarely an "Aha!" experience. We learn through living, exploration, questioning and experimentation. Unfortunately, sometimes our experiments turn out badly and we end up hurting someone's feelings, or having our own feelings hurt. This can be a very painful experience, and I hope that this handbook will give future PCVs structured guidance in their early discoveries about Sri Lankan culture.

As I was preparing to come to Sri Lanka in 1990, I raided the local bookstores for any information I could find on Sri Lanka. Luckily I was able to find a few books and I read them with almost religious fervor. I wanted to know about the culture so that at most, I would fit in when I got there, and at the least, I wouldn't insult someone. However, after I'd spent some time in Sri Lanka, I realized that some of the things I had read weren't true. Or, at least they weren't true for my reality. I was living in Galle on a similar level to my Sri Lankan counterparts. I quickly learned that there are two realities in Sri Lanka - Colombo, and the rest of the island. Many guidebooks inform you of the Colombo perspective, which represents the upper-class, Western-style, thinking in the country. And, of course, they <u>are</u> filled with true facts - from the Colombo perspective. For example, I remember talking with a man from Colombo who adamantly claimed that there were no longer arranged marriages in Sri Lanka. But I had just been to the celebration of an arranged marriage a few weeks earlier! In fact, if you read the newspaper it is quite common to see advertisements by parents looking for suitable marriage partners for their grown children. So in view of my experiences with guidebooks and Colombo-ites, I felt there was a need to more realistically address the cultural perspective that Peace Corps Volunteers encounter. Traditionally, when guidebooks offer advice on cultural norms, they tell you "about" the customs and maybe "how" to respond appropriately. But through my coursework at the School for International Training, I've found that it is invaluable to look at "why" these customs exist and how I

might relate to them as an American. So I hope that this handbook will offer a more in-depth examination into Sri Lankan culture through observation and personal introspection.

Of course, this cultural handbook will be limited. A handbook on every aspect of Sri Lankan culture would fill volumes, and this is just meant as a "band-aid" introduction to Sri Lankan culture. For this reason, I decided to concentrate on five cultural aspects that I thought most affected PCV life. After exploring the issues in this handbook, I hope you will be able to use this format as you continue making your own unique discoveries about Sri Lanka. If you are interested in further reading to guide your exploration of Sri Lanka, I have listed some readings in the back of this book.

I would like to make a disclaimer that the information in this book may not be true for everyone. The work is based largely on my own opinions, which were shaped by my experience living in Galle and teaching at the DELIC center. Galle is a fairly large town, and very different from village life. I was married, so I didn't experience the isolation that other PCVs may have. I was a teacher, so received a large measure of respect and caring from my students. These experiences may be very different from yours. Everyone has had the experience of reading something and then finding that it is not true for them. So I ask you to understand that this information is one perspective on the Sri Lankan culture that is shared by many PCVs. Although you may eventually disagree with some of my opinions, I hope you will find the introspective questions useful in defining your own understanding of Sri Lankan culture.

This handbook will follow a specific format designed to teach culture. "A Framework for Learning/Teaching Culture", by Patrick Moran - School for International Training, was developed to provide students with a more in-depth understanding of cultures they experience. The model breaks down learning about culture into four components - 1. Culture as Knowing About, 2. Culture as Knowing How, 3. Culture as Knowing Why, and 4. Culture as Knowing Oneself.

In "Knowing About", you will learn the basic facts of the culture; what the customs are. In "Knowing How", you will learn how to behave appropriately in cultural situations. At the end of each of these sections is an interactive activity designed to help you practice the new behaviors you will use in Sri Lanka. In "Knowing Why", you will examine your own perspectives on why the Sri Lankan do what they do. And in "Knowing Oneself", you will examine your own feelings and values around some of the cultural norms in Sri Lanka. Although this book only addresses five aspects of Sri Lankan culture, Moran's "Framework for Learning/Teaching Culture", can serve as a guiding model as you unravel the intricate puzzle of Sri Lankan culture.

Chapter Two

Appearance

Knowing What

It comes as a rude surprise to many PCVs that appearance is such an important aspect of Sri Lankan culture. As I used to joke, "I came 10,000 miles to learn how to iron!" Sri Lankans are very conscientious about their clothing and appearance, and even the poorest people take special care to wash and iron their clothes. PCVs may have a pre-conceived idea about appropriate dress in under-developed countries from the PC ads. These ads usually show PCVs working under the hot sun in a field wearing shorts and a t-shirt. Unfortunately this is not appropriate clothing for Sri Lanka, even though it is a tropical climate!

In regards to Sri Lanka, people are commonly judged and given respect according to their appearance. This can be aggravating to PCVs who are used to a more casual American system where for example, a bank president may wear shorts and a t-shirt on the weekend. In the American mind-set, no matter what your status, there is great flexibility in choice of clothing depending on the social situation. Standards of appearance in Sri Lanka are less flexible and more formal than in the U.S., and some PCVs rebel against the strict nature of this system. This is understandable, yet the more attention a PCV pays to appearance, the more likely they are to be accepted and respected. One experience that had a strong impression on me was at the house of a very poor Sri Lankan family. The mother, who worked near the bus stand and saw many tourists, was talking to a neighbor about my husband and I. She said, "These two are very good. They are not tourists! She always wears a nice dress, and he wears long pants and a good shirt. I see them every day riding their bikes." It appears that Sri Lankans really appreciate the effort to join in their cultural norms. Below are some descriptions of appropriate dress in Sri Lanka.

Women

You may have noticed Sri Lankan women wearing what is commonly called a "frock". Even middle-aged women wear these dresses of light cotton material with puffy sleeves and frilly scallops. They often have embroidered flowers or little, "cutesy" decals. You may have also become aware that nylons are not worn and sandals go with everything. It is possible to wear any style dress, as long as it is not sleeveless, see-through or back-less. A summery, cotton dress with short sleeves is very useful, and the skirt should be knee-length or longer. Some PC women like to wear the national dress such as a saree. This often gets many "oohs" and "aahs" from the Sri Lankans and they are very impressed. Unfortunately it is often a bit impractical to wear, because it must be folded just right and you aren't able to ride a bike. More commonly worn by PC women, is the Muslim "Punjab". These are

part of the culture, yet allow the PCV to wear "pants" of a sort. They are also beautiful and comfortable to wear and care for.

PC women can wear their hair any way they want. But if you observe Sri Lankan women, you will notice that long hair is definitely preferred. Short hair is worn by little girls, and my experience with really short hair was hearing the brutally honest comment, "Oh, it's so ugly! It was more beautiful long." Similarly, make-up is not worn. It is considered garish and unnecessary. You may find this a relief since the humid weather makes the make-up slide right off anyway!

Men

My first impression of Sri Lankan mens' dress was, "Oh, it's just like the fifties!" You'll observe the standard dress is a white button-down shirt, polyester long pants with a sharp crease, and either dress shoes worn with white socks or a pair of sandals. Polyester may not be your style, but cotton dress pants, (such as Bugle Boy, for example) are acceptable as long as they are pressed. Short-sleeved cotton shirts are very comfortable, but should also always be clean and pressed. Sandals can be worn almost everywhere, but if you are teaching or have an important meeting, it is more appropriate to wear dress shoes such as Dockers. Some PCVs have gone bare-foot because they have seen some Sri Lankans without shoes. Besides being dangerous health-wise, it is inappropriate because of your status as a PCV. Sri Lankans without shoes may be without them simply because they can't afford them.

A valuable piece of clothing for men is the sarong. Most Sri Lankan men wear this in their homes in the evening while relaxing. At first it may feel funny to wear a "skirt", but they are really quite cool and comfortable and Sri Lankans will praise you for joining their culture. Knotting the sarong so it doesn't fall off takes some skill. But with some instruction from Sri Lankans and practice on your own, it will become second nature. Some PCVs get the mistaken impression that it's okay to wear the sarong outside the home because they see some Sri Lankans wearing them. However, the Sri Lankans who wear sarongs on the streets are often laborers and poor people. If the PCV is a teacher, then there is a class difference and wearing a sarong in town might jeopardize his/her level of respect. Besides the fact that wearing a sarong in town makes the PCV look like a tourist. If the PCV is an agriculture volunteer and living in a village, then it's best to see what the "norm" seems to be. Regarding appropriate dress, it always pays to be careful; your reputation is at stake.

Men and Women at the Beach and in Colombo

In Colombo you can let down your hair a bit. The capital is more fashionable and it is common to see young couples in jeans and t-shirts. Or even young Sri Lankan women wearing make-up and mini-skirts. So this is a place to exercise your God-given American right to dress as you please. However you should keep in mind appropriate dress for different situations. For example, if you are going to a conference, shorts and a t-shirt are unacceptable. This seems obvious, but there has

been some confusion in the past. Similarly, if you are going to the Peace Corps office, nice appearance is appreciated. The staff is dressed professionally and important visitors may be passing through as well. It shows cultural sensitivity to dress appropriately.

At the beach, you may finally feel that you can blend into the crowd because you are among foreigners. Casual beach attire is appropriate, although one-piece bathing suits are preferable. Foreigners commonly sun-bathe topless or nude and needless to say this is totally inappropriate and an insult to the Sri Lankan culture. A sarong can be very handy at the beach as a wrap-up or sun-bathing mat.

Knowing How

Now that you know what to wear, you may be saying to yourself, "This sounds like a big hassle. How am I going to do it?" Well, admittedly, some aspects of appearance do take extra energy in Sri Lanka. For example, washing clothes by hand and then ironing them takes some effort to learn, but is very worthwhile. I suggest having a host-mother or sister show you how they wash clothes and then give you a detailed ironing lesson. PCV men may have to fight for the right to wash their own clothes and iron them, as the Sri Lankan women in the family may want to take care of him. Washing clothes can be made simpler if you don't have so many clothes to wash. If you find washing your clothes by hand too strenuous or time-consuming, there are laundry services in medium sized towns. These launderers will hand over your clothes in spotless condition and ironed to perfection. If you live in a smaller town, you may be able to locate a Dhobi, a man or woman who washes clothes. The service is usually cheap, but with any laundry service in Sri Lanka, you may find some buttons cracked or missing due to aggressive cleaning methods.

Tailors are a dime a dozen in Sri Lanka and both men and women can have things made easily and cheaply. Of course no one expects a PCV woman to wear a Sri Lankan "frock". Because of the big difference in fashion between Sri Lanka and the U.S., many PCV women bring catalog pictures of dresses they would like made. Most tailors are able to make a very good copy of simple dresses. Men can go to the tailor's and choose the pants and shirt material they would like and then have them tailored to fit. Another option is to do some shopping in Colombo. Sri Lanka manufactures and exports a lot of U.S. brand name clothing. A good place to shop is ODELS, on Dickman's road in Bambalapitiya. A shirt that would sell for $20 in the U.S. is sold there for $3 or $4.

Sandals are the most useful item in your wardrobe and thankfully they are very easy to fix when they break. There is a shoe-fixer on almost every corner and they will quickly sew up or nail your sandal while you wait. This service is extremely convenient and cheap, usually only 5 rupees (15 cents).

The most important thing regarding your appearance in Sri Lanka is to plan the extra time needed to get ready. If you have to be somewhere at 1:00, don't throw on your wrinkled pants at 12:55. Think ahead and remember that what you wear

will reflect on you. If you are concerned with making a good impression with Sri Lankans, then a good place to start is with your appearance.

Activity: Do a role play or fashion show, showing the appropriate dress and appearance for PCVs in Sri Lanka.

Knowing Why

1. Next time you're in a public place, observe the public. What are the men and women wearing? Write a short description.

2. Go to the beach or Colombo and observe what Sri Lankans and Westerners are wearing. Write your observation and opinion.

3. Talk to three Sri Lankans about what they wear and why. (Preferably three people in your field.)

4. Why do you think appearance is so important to Sri Lankans?

5. What differences do you see between U.S. and Sri Lankan attitudes to appearance? Explain your answer.

Knowing Oneself

1. How do you usually dress in the U.S.? Describe different styles of dressing for different social situations. What is formal, what is casual?

2. For women: Do you often wear dresses? How do you feel about wearing a dress?

3. For men: How do you feel about wearing pants and a dress shirt in a tropical climate?

4. Do you feel that what you wear defines who you are?

5. How flexible do you feel you can be to accommodate Sri Lankan appearance standards? Write a one page answer giving your explanation.

6. Write one page on how you feel about living in a culture that will judge you by what you wear. Also, (if you feel uncomfortable with this attitude) what strategies will you use to cope with this?

Chapter Three

Invitations

Knowing What

Showing hospitality is very important to Sri Lankans. As a relative celebrity in Sri Lanka, you will receive many invitations. This can be very fun, but also very wearing. If you understand what to expect, it might help ease the stress of a long visit, or help you understand the appropriate way to decline an invitation.

Friends and students will invite you to lunch, and it's very important to them that you come and enjoy their hospitality. My experience with this was that when they say "lunch", they usually want you to come at 9 a.m. and stay the whole day. This can be quite tiring, especially when you are still getting the hang of Sinhala! The hospitality often begins before you leave your home. I've had Sri Lankans hire a van to pick me up because they were sure I could never take a public bus on my own. And I've also had motorcycle escorts which appeared to be an easier method of guiding me to their home, than trusting my weak Sinhala to understand the directions. I personally feel this also ensures that you will show up in the morning and not just before lunch. At any rate, it is an interesting and fun day. When you get to the home, you are served tea and a number of sweets and bananas. You sit in the living room and are the center of attention. Don't be surprised if the neighbors stop by. They are very curious and excited about the visiting "sudu" (white person) that speaks Sinhala. The women are usually busy in the kitchen, so you may be talking to the father and sons in the family. This may be a bit disconcerting, especially if the person who invited you is a woman and you don't know her family. PC women have more latitude about going into the kitchen and talking to the women while they cook. PC men will probably get pushed out, mainly because the women aren't used to having a man in the kitchen. If the PC man is really interested in their cooking, the Sri Lankan women will usually get a kick out of it. During your visit, your hosts may ask you many questions, or sometimes just sit quietly around you. It's not really necessary to speak. They are often enthusiastic about showing you around their garden, especially if they have fruit trees. If the fruit is in season, you will most likely get a generous bag of it as a gift.

The lunch is served later than you might expect, but when it arrives, it is usually a feast. Even poor families will do as much as they can to put on a nice spread. Meat is considered a "fancy" dish, and chicken seems to be a favorite. Another special treat is chutney or Malay pickle. Sometimes the family will have reduced the spice for you because they think a foreigner can't handle it. This can be aggravating, especially if you've been eating spicy rice and curry for over a year! But whatever the quality of the meal, it is important to gush over everything, and eat many helpings. The family will gather around and watch while you eat. Their sole happiness at this moment is to serve you. Although it's important to clean your plate, you may never see the bottom because they keep piling on more helpings!

Sometimes the men in the family will eat with you while the women stand around and serve. This comes from the tradition that the men eat first and the women serve them. Women appear to eat later in the kitchen

Water is usually served with the meal, or sometimes a Coke. Sri Lankans don't drink anything until the end of the meal. They feel that the water might fill them up unnecessarily. If the food is very spicy, this might be difficult, but the Sri Lankans are understanding and don't mind if you drink water. If you ask for boiled water, you will probably get just that. The Sri Lankans drink tap water and they don't understand what you mean by boiled water. A nice hot glass of water is hardly what you want for a burning mouth.

After lunch, you are asked to sit in the living room again. If you offer to help clean up, the family will vehemently decline. This offer makes them nervous, because they want to serve you. If you are full and appear sleepy, they may ask if you want to take a nap. This is a sincere request and you can take them up on it if you feel like it. Tea will be served again around 3:30 or 4:00. Picture taking also usually occurs sometime during the day. Because very few Sri Lankans have cameras, they will be very excited about picture taking and may even change outfits many times! These picture sessions often made me feel like a presidential candidate because I stood smiling while the Sri Lankans took turns standing next to me. It is also very likely that the family will want to take you on a walk to show you their local temple.

Another common form of invitation is the Almsgiving. This is a celebration for the anniversary of someone's death. It is often a huge party and it's not uncommon to have 100 guests or more. People tend to come and go throughout the day, but the important part of the event is the chanting by Buddhist Monks. The family can tell you what time the Monks will chant, so you don't arrive in the middle of it. After the Monks have eaten, then the guests begin to eat. It is usually an all day affair.

Knowing How

In general it is insulting to directly refuse an invitation in Sri Lanka. It took me a year to learn this and I can still remember the crushed look on a student's face when I told him I was unable to come to his Almsgiving because I had other plans. At the time I didn't see anything wrong with my straight forward American response to his invitation. However, when invited to an Almsgiving or other large party that you won't be able to attend, the appropriate thing to say is, "I'll try to come." This is understood to mean that you most likely will not come, but this answer allows both parties in the conversation to save face. By using this expression, you are sincerely expressing your desire to be with them, but letting them know you cannot. If you do not go to the party, then later when you see the host, you make sure to tell them that you "tried to come", but you had "unavoidable circumstances". There is no need to elaborate on what those circumstances were.

If you receive a personal invitation for lunch at someone's house and you cannot make it, then it is best to express your strong interest in eating with them, but let them know that you can't come on the date they offered. You can say, "Yes, I

would really like to visit, but I have something else on that day. How about the next Saturday?" If you offer another day, then they will know you are serious in your intent. On the other hand, if you don't really want to eat with them, then it is best to vaguely state, "Yes, I'm not sure what day will be good for me, I'll have to see." If you never commit to the date, then you don't have to eat there.

When you go for the lunch, it is appropriate to bring a small gift for the family such as a package of biscuits (cookies), or fruit. The family will probably not open it front of you. You may also want to bring pictures from home. Since you are the "show", the family will be very interested in what you bring. You also may want to bring your own boiled and cooled water in a little jug. Most Sri Lankans understand the explanation that you need this for health reasons. If you want to ask the family for boiled and cooled water, you can say, "Utturupu sittalay watura".

Although you may feel uncomfortable being served at every turn, you must accept it. But the family will enjoy your words of appreciation. Effusive "thank you's" and comments on the food show that they have done a good job of hosting. Another way that you can show appreciation for the food is by accepting many helpings of the curries. Large plates of rice do not impress them, they want you to enjoy the curries. If you have reached your limit and want them to stop serving you, you may say in a laughing manner, "Aeti!" (Enough) or "Bada pirila" (stomach full). If they try to sneak another spoonful on your plate, you may have to stop them by covering your plate with your hands to make your point.

When tea is served, you should eat a little of everything. Especially any homemade sweets they may provide. Many PCVs find the sweets unappetizing and the tea too sugary. If you honestly can't stand it, then it's possible to say that you have a blood sugar problem. Most Sri Lankans understand this and will offer you plain tea with fruit. It's best if you can tell them what would make you happy so they can serve you well.

Unfortunately if you are uncomfortable with the family watching you eat, there is not much you can do. Try to relax and remember that you are making your hosts very happy by letting them serve you.

If you are unable to attend an Almsgiving that you said "yes" to, there is no need to send word that you can't come. But you must apologize profusely when you next see the host. If you can't make it to a personal lunch, then it's best to send word as early as possible. This may be difficult because of the lack of phones. But if you have time, you can send a telegram. If it is the day you are expected, your host family may be able to help you find a young boy or servant who can take the message to the family for you.

Activity: Do a role play that shows being invited and entertained in a Sri Lankan home. Also show how you might decline an invitation.

Knowing Why

1. What similarities or differences do you see between U.S. and Sri Lankan invitations and treatment of guests?

2. If you say, "I'll try to come." in America, what does it mean?

3. Talk to three Sri Lankans about their beliefs on how to entertain guests and why.

4. Write one page on why you think Sri Lankans entertain the way they do. (Why did they develop these customs regarding invitations and serving guests?)

5. Choose one item from the "How" section and write about why you think things are done that way.

Knowing Oneself

1. Are you an introvert or an extrovert? (An introvert is defined as someone who loses energy in groups and an extrovert gains energy in groups.) How do you think this will affect you when you are a guest in a Sri Lankan home?

2. What makes you feel comfortable when you are a guest in someone's home in the U.S.?

3. What do you think you will like or dislike about being a guest in a Sri Lankan home?

4. Look back on the "How" and "What" sections and choose one aspect that makes you uncomfortable. Write a one page explanation of your feelings and include some strategies you might use to deal with those feelings.

Chapter Four

Work Attitudes

Knowing What

Working with Sri Lankans may be a very challenging and unforgettable part of your PC service. Work attitudes and norms differ significantly between the U.S. and Sri Lanka. Things move much more slowly in Sri Lanka than the U.S., and there is more importance placed on relationships than the product. Some PCVs find this refreshing, while others find it extremely frustrating.

Supervisors, or people in authority in Sri Lanka are very powerful. Their employees do not question them or their decisions. Planning is rarely a democratic process and any questions, even to clarify things, may be seen as a threat to the supervisors authority. Some supervisors are able to handle the American methods of participation, but others feel threatened by it. Because of this power aspect, a lot of Sri Lankan employees live in fear of their higher ups. At the school where I worked, the coordinator was forever obsessing about filling out forms correctly and keeping records. She claimed that "they" might come to check. This seemed like a ridiculous worry to me, since the "higher ups" had never visited the school in the five years it had been operating, and it was unlikely they ever would. However this was a very real fear for her, and she got after us all to do our paperwork. There is a lot of paperwork in Sri Lankan workplaces, and forms are revered as gods. This contributes to the slow pace of the country, but I attribute it to the British who instituted the forms and then left them behind.

One of the reasons employees will not question a supervisor, or even offer their opinion on a decision, is the concern of "losing face". If they question their supervisor, especially in public, this shames their supervisor and makes them look foolish. This in turn, will make the supervisor very angry and liable to take it out on the employee. Since the supervisor has almost absolute power he/she could make life very difficult for this employee. For this reason, it may be very difficult or uncomfortable for an employee to "speak up" at work.

Another reason that employees don't offer dissenting opinions is that a good relationship is more important than the product. Even if employees don't like each other that well, they keep it to themselves and on the surface show goodwill towards each other. Chatting and drinking tea together are important parts of the day. Tea breaks are taken religiously in the morning and afternoon, and sometimes more often! Women often bring their own tea in a thermos and share snacks together, while men will often go to a tea shop for theirs.

At first it may be difficult for PCVs to understand the "indirect" messages they receive from their co-workers. A PCV might have a good idea and present it to their boss. The boss says they like the idea and will look into it. Weeks pass and nothing happens and every time the PCV asks their boss about it, they get an "I'm looking into it." answer. This can be very frustrating and the PCV may feel that they were lied to and that the boss is lazy or uncaring. There may be more to the picture. The

boss may be communicating indirectly that they like the idea, but that they can't do anything. Or perhaps a similar idea was tried before and didn't work, but they don't want to tell you and have you "lose face". Or there may be a more personal reason such as they are afraid to speak to their boss about the possibility of trying the idea. Most Americans want to know exactly where their idea stands and why. It may be very difficult to get this information and questioning may make the supervisor very uncomfortable. It's possible that other co-workers might know the answer, and could help out with an explanation. But it seems that if a Sri Lankan doesn't know why their supervisor won't follow an idea, they don't pursue it.

An irony about working in Sri Lanka is that workplaces may have many rules about running the place, but they are often broken. For example, employee tardiness and absences. Because employees often have to commute long distances, it is not uncommon for them to be late. I remember one PCV telling a story about a man he met on the train to Colombo. The train was due to arrive in Colombo at 10:30 am. The PCV asked the man about his workplace and what time he started. "9:00." He answered matter of factly. The PCV, confused, asked, "Oh, so you are taking the late train today?" The Sri Lankan answered, "No, actually I take this train every day." It turns out that the man also caught the 3:30 PM train leaving Colombo every day even though he was supposed to work until 4:30. This is an example of the flexibility in work hours. As a teacher it is not uncommon to have a teacher on the staff who doesn't show up for days or months. If you ask co-workers about the missing employee, they will say, "He might come." But they usually don't plan for him. It is acceptable for the employee to show up without an explanation, or if one is necessary, they will say, "I had unavoidable circumstances."

Since there are few phones it is not expected that employees will contact the employer when they are sick and can't come to work. If you have a meeting scheduled and someone doesn't show up, it is not a serious thing. You just re-schedule the meeting. If the person shows up late because of bus problems or something else, they may offer the explanation and end it with, "What to do?" This is a rhetorical question that denotes powerlessness in the situation. This statement may be used even if a person is late every day.

Another reason employees miss work is for family matters. Family and friends are very important in Sri Lanka and it is a very acceptable excuse to go out of town to help a sick relative or to prepare an Almsgiving. The employee may be gone for an unspecified amount of time, but they will still get paid. In the case of the school teachers, their co-workers always sign in for the missing employee. Or that employee comes in occasionally to sign their name under every date they missed.

Knowing How

It's best to remember that relationships come first and anything you are working on is secondary. Your co-workers will appreciate any time you spend chatting with them and sharing tea and treats. This may get frustrating after awhile because you are here for a short time and want to do great things. But try to keep it

in perspective. To the Sri Lankans, building a good relationship with them may be the greatest thing you do.

Relationships with supervisors can be rocky at times when the U.S. work ethic clashes with the Sri Lankan. A PCV may not feel they are challenging their supervisor by asking a question or offering a suggestion for improvement. But you have to remember that usually this supervisor has been living like a king and may never have been questioned. There also may be some insecure feelings regarding a foreigner coming in and "taking over" the show. In the beginning it's best to go easy and get to know your co-workers. You will need their trust and help as you work on projects. They can be very useful in helping you understand your work situation, and if they trust you, then they will give you background information on your supervisor. To show respect when speaking to a supervisor, a PCV should always use "Mr." or "Miss/Mrs." with the supervisors last name. The PCV can change this only if their supervisor asks them to.

Just because your supervisor may be sensitive to criticism doesn't mean that you shouldn't challenge them. Part of the role of the PCV is to introduce American ideas to the situation. However the most important thing is to choose your battles carefully. Find something that is <u>really important</u> to you and work on that point, rather than fighting little battles all the time. Some supervisors are extremely difficult to work with because of the way they wield their power, or if they are corrupt. This may be a time when the PCV speaks out. But other Sri Lankans will rarely support you even if they know the truth in everything you say. They see you as the newcomer who will be gone in two years, while they will be living with this supervisor for a long time. Again, it's important to them to keep a good relationship on the surface. If your relationship with your supervisor is very poor, it may be worth it to identify other people that you could work with more effectively. If you are going to confront a supervisor, it is best to do it in private.

Regarding absences and missed meetings, it's best to be casual about it. You can only control your own behavior and getting angry will not change the situation. There may be a legitimate reason the person did not show up, and usually it is not a reflection on you.

Activity: Choose a situation from the above descriptions and do a role play. Ask some Sri Lankans for feedback on the interactions you presented.

Knowing Why

1. Why do you think Sri Lankans are so flexible on tardiness and absences?

2. Talk to three Sri Lankans about their views of their workplace, boss and the use of authority in Sri Lanka.

3. Describe a past U.S. working relationship you had with a boss. How is it different from a Sri Lankan one?

4. Why do you think Sri Lankans allow authority figures to have so much power?

Knowing Oneself

1. What is your work ethic? Do you feel other people should have the same beliefs?

2. Think of a time when you felt powerless. (Perhaps when dealing with a bureaucracy.) How did you react?

3. What do you think you will like/dislike about the work environment in Sri Lanka?

4. Choose one aspect of working in Sri Lanka that you will find difficult to handle. Write a one page explanation and describe some strategies you might use to handle the situation.

Chapter Five

Behavior

Knowing What

In many ways, Sri Lankan culture is opposite from the U.S. Where Americans value independence, Sri Lankans value dependence on the community. Every American fiercely guards the right to privacy, while in Sri Lanka people are rarely alone and everyone usually knows everyone's business. Mens' and womens' roles in Sri Lanka appear to be very well defined, and also quite different from U.S. roles. Some volunteers find this fascinating and others view it indignantly. PCV women may especially feel the difference between their American and Sri Lankan roles. One of the reasons Peace Corps is such a growing experience is that a PCV begins to understand another world view by coming into contact with behaviors and customs very different from those in the U.S. This can be fascinating, challenging and frustrating, and many PCVs struggle with the question, "How much do I want to change my own behavior to fit into this culture?"

Perhaps one of the first things you may notice is the lack of privacy. If you are living with a host family, you may be disconcerted by the fact that they never leave you alone. If you are trying to read a book, a young boy watches you. If you try to hang your clothes out to dry, the mother and sisters gather around you. If you try to find a quiet spot to "get away from it all", you are surrounded by a group of young men who want to talk to you. This is definitely life in a fishbowl, and it can be easily misconstrued as persecution by privacy minded Americans. But really, it is just part of the Sri Lankan culture. Most Sri Lankans say they feel lonely if they are alone. Some of my students even said they felt scared if they had to stay in the house alone during the day. Sri Lankans want to include everyone and if someone is alone, they worry that the person might be sick, or sad, or angry. They do not have the concept of being alone for pleasure and relaxation.

Social interaction with Sri Lankans can offer many opportunities for confusion. Starting with their indirect form of communicating that is different from the American "direct" approach. Sri Lankans don't want to hurt anyone's feelings, so they will tell you a "white lie" in order to avoid saying "no" or giving their honest opinion if it is different than yours. Interpreting their "real" message requires extra sensitivity (and practice) on the part of the PCV.

Another confusing aspect of communication for PCVs is the Sri Lankan "head bobble." This is a slight (or major, depending on enthusiasm) bobble of the head back and forth, and it indicates "yes." To the American eye it seems to say, "no," or "I'm not sure." The word "Ha" is often said with the head bobble as a way to emphasize the "yes."

Interaction between men and women is more reserved than the U.S. Single men and women are rarely alone together in public or in the home. (With the exception of dating which I will describe later.) Young women and men are referred to as, "girls" and "boys" until they are married, which may occur as late as thirty. It

is somewhat insulting to refer to an unmarried "girl" as a woman, perhaps because it implies that she is not a virgin. Men and women do not touch in public, (or even in the home much), even if they are married. However it is okay for men and women to touch members of their same sex. This usually takes the form of a "long" hand shake with men, much like holding hands as you speak. But young men who are close friends may also throw an arm around each others' shoulders, or even sit on each others' laps. Women aren't quite as affectionate with each other, but it is possible to see them holding hands.

Part of the reason that there are such strict divisions between men and women is that, for the most part, dating is prohibited. Arranged marriages are still common in Sri Lanka and many parents expect their children to marry the mate they choose for them. Although many people in the younger generation would rather pick their own mate through a "love" marriage, they are afraid to challenge their parents' authority. So, when "love" marriages do occur, it is usually a major scandal along the lines of Romeo and Juliet. This sometimes results in the couple being expelled from the village, but the parents usually relent once the first grandchild is born. Because of the increased number of "love affairs" (dating, in American terms), PCVs will see young couples sitting together in parks, partially hidden by umbrellas. These appear to be innocent romances where the couple holds hands and share their deepest feelings. But these romances are not to be taken lightly, since there really is no such thing as dating. Once a "boy" and "girl" decide to start a "love affair", it means they intend to get married. If they "break up", it is another huge scandal which usually reflects badly on the girl and may affect her ability to get married. Most men want a wife who has only loved them.

As I said, men and womens' roles in Sri Lanka are quite different from those in the U.S. Typically Sri Lankan women are encouraged to be shy and innocent. For this reason they do not drink alcohol or smoke - ever. They are also conditioned to take care of others, especially men. As one Sri Lankan woman tried to explain to me, "Actually, it is not nice if men have to do housework. For us, it is an honor to serve them, because they are like gods actually. Not really like gods, but like gods." Men have more liberties and tend to be more out-going and the leaders in their communities. Some are quite used to being pampered by women, although more and more men are becoming more helpful around the house. It is also common to see men doing the marketing or other burdensome work. Men may drink alcohol and smoke, and the frequency of these behaviors varies greatly. Some men rarely drink or smoke, while others make a habit of it and are often out of the house, partying with other men. There is very little awareness of alcohol abuse and addiction in Sri Lanka, and it is just considered annoying behavior by the women.

Just a short note on the pace of life in Sri Lanka. Everything moves slowly, and it rarely pays to try to rush things. This relaxed attitude can be seen in the streets where people walk at a leisurely pace, and at the bank where the clerk is slowly checking the files for your account balance and then leaving the information on another desk for someone else to type. Such a slow pace may cause frustration at times, but at times it makes sense due to the tropical climate. PCVs who zip frantically around town and try to get everything done immediately are likely to give themselves heat exhaustion.

Knowing How

Regarding the lack of privacy you will experience, the most important thing is to keep a sense of humor. If you can laugh rather than losing your temper, you will be much happier in the long run. Picture what your friends and family would say at the thought of you trying to read a book while a couple of Sri Lankans watch you. The second thing to remember is to keep it all in perspective. The Sri Lankans are around you so much because they care about you, and find you interesting. They want to make sure that you aren't lonely or sick. You can help them to understand your feelings by specifically explaining how privacy is important to you in the U.S. Assure them that you are not lonely or sick and that you are happy to be alone sometimes. If you can, it is helpful to have a lock on your door. But you should make sure that the family understands that you are locking the door because you want to be alone, not because you don't like them. Another reason for locking the door is that the family (especially children) will likely go through your things. This is not unusual because in a Sri Lankan family there is no privacy. Parents commonly read their childrens' mail. Anything you throw away is fair game too, so if you have something very personal, it is a good idea to throw it away at a different location. There is a funny story about a PCV woman who threw out a plastic birth control packet and returned later to find the family had made a little shrine out of it with a picture of Buddha propped inside!

As I mentioned earlier, dating is not really done in Sri Lanka. For this reason, it is not recommended that PCVs get romantically involved with Sri Lankans unless they are looking to get married. Starting a romantic relationship could cause such scandal that the volunteer could lose the respect of their counterparts, or even be asked to leave the village. However, on a happier note, many PCVs have married Sri Lankans and gained acceptance in the community, so it can be done. Just be sure of what you're doing! Both male and female PCVs should be careful in their friendships with the opposite sex. Having a good friend of the opposite sex is very rare. PCV women should be especially wary, because a Sri Lankan man might say he understands that you only want to be friends, and then make a move on you. This can be very upsetting. The best thing is to go very slowly and speak to trusted Sri Lankan friends and family for advice. They will know what is appropriate.

When communicating with Sri Lankans about a problem, keep in mind the indirect approach and how you can help them save face. This seems like an elaborate game, but as I said, it is important to Sri Lankans to maintain positive relationships. If you think of their feelings before you say something, you might have a better idea of how to phrase it. For example, if your host family is serving you very bland rice and curry, but you would like it hotter, you can say, "I had rice and curry in town today and it was very hot, but so delicious! I really like spicy food." In this way you've given the family the message that you want hotter food, but you didn't criticize the mother's cooking.

PCV men may drink and smoke with the Sri Lankan men. But Sri Lankan women will often be very impressed if PCV men behave differently from Sri Lankan men and don't drink. However there is often strong pressure on PCV men

from Sri Lankan men to drink with them. If a PCV goes to the local drinking establishment and gets drunk, it may affect their reputation negatively. This is true especially if it happens often. PCV women do not have so much lee-way in their behavior. They will definitely get a bad reputation if they drink; and smoking is strongly looked down upon as well. Although with smoking, the Sri Lankans are aware that it is something American women do. But even still, your family will not like it. If you are a regular smoker, you will either have to quit, or find an open-minded family to accept you as you are. Another issue for male and female PCVs is what is appropriate when a PCV of the opposite sex comes to visit. In most cases (especially in the village) it is best to find another house for your guest to stay in. But if your family has a big enough house, they may allow you to have the guest stay in the house. But in general the family worries about its reputation in the community and doesn't want people to think the PCV is promiscuous. Since the concept of men and women being "just friends" doesn't really exist in Sri Lanka, this safeguards your reputation from those who are sure this is your boyfriend or girlfriend. If you do have a PCV boyfriend or girlfriend, it is best to meet in a large town far away from your site. Kandy or Colombo is probably the best.

The slow pace of life in Sri Lanka has its positives and negatives, but one thing is for sure, you can't rush it! Anger is almost never effective, in fact it often results in even slower service. The best thing to do is to plan ahead and leave plenty of time for what you need to do. There is nothing worse than rushing to the bank when you're broke and being unable to get your money because they are closing. The second thing to do is relax. Rushing around or getting angry is not going to speed things up in Sri Lanka. It's the perfect time to say, "If you can't beat them, join them."

Activity: Choose one of the behavioral situations presented above and do a role-play. Ask some Sri Lankans for feedback on your representation.

Knowing Why

1. Talk to three Sri Lankans about the appropriate behavior for men and women in Sri Lanka.

2. Why do you think there are different behavioral standards for men and women? (Does it serve a purpose? Is there a historical perspective?)

3. Why do you think views of privacy are so different between Sri Lanka and the U.S.?

4. Next time you are in public, observe the activities around you. What evidence to you see of a slower pace of life than the U.S.? Write one page on what you saw.

Knowing Oneself

1. Choose one aspect of behavior that will be most challenging for you. Describe why and offer some strategies for coping with these behaviors.

2. What is your normal pace of life? How does that fit with the Sri Lankan lifestyle?

3. For women: Describe your yourself as an American woman, and your views on American womens' roles. How does this fit or not fit with the Sri Lankan lifestyle?

4. Do you consider yourself an introvert or extrovert? How will this fit or not fit with living in the Sri Lankan culture. Write one page explaining different strategies you might use to handle any differences.

Chapter Six

Harassment

Knowing What

Unfortunately harassment is also a part of the Peace Corps experience in Sri Lanka. This may come as a shock to PCVs who hold idealistic pictures of themselves working side-by-side on a project with smiling host country nationals. Well, there will be moments like this too, but every once in a while harassment rears its ugly head. If the PCV is prepared for this rather unsavory aspect of Sri Lankan culture, then perhaps it will be possible to keep it all in perspective. Life in the fishbowl draws both positive and negative attention.

A lot of harassment occurs in touristy areas. Because of the money involved in dealing with foreigners, a whole Sri Lankan sub-culture has sprung up to provide services for tourists. Unfortunately a group of the more unsavory characters are known as "touts". The touts will show up out of nowhere and offer to show you around the town. They will try to take you to a shop or hotel where the owner will be compelled to charge you a higher price and give a commission to the tout later. Touts may also be involved in selling drugs. Although the touts are annoying, it seems that they have job security since many tourists do business with them.

Tourism is viewed very negatively by many Sri Lankans because of the insulting behavior of a lot of tourists. Nude sunbathing, drug use and inappropriate dress and behavior make tourists an obvious threat to the Sri Lankan culture. Western culture has also had an impact on Sri Lankan culture through advertising and TV. If you say that you are American, probably the first thing you will hear is "Dynasty". TV has only been in Sri Lanka for about the last 10 years, but through this medium Sri Lankans have shaped a new view of the world. In the case of Americans, the Sri Lankans may expect you to be rich and live a "Dynasty"-like, lifestyle.

Another form of harassment comes from a surprising source --- children. It is quite common for children to shout out, "Hello boom, boom." (They are asking for a bon bon or candy.) or "Hello, school pen." In some instances they may shout "sudu" or white person. These may seem like trivial comments, but the children can be quite persistent and when you've heard the taunts a million times, you just don't have the patience. Nothing is quite as aggravating as having a group of boys giggling gleefully as they point you out in a crowd, or worse yet follow you down the street begging for school pens. I remember different times at the beach being surrounded by groups of children demanding school pens. They would not leave me alone, even after I explained to them in Sinhala that I wasn't a tourist. But to them, I was a foreigner and therefor a tourist; "tourist color" as they put it. This aggravating behavior by children is another ill effect of tourism. There are many tourists who give children school pens or candy and this reinforces the begging behavior. Rarely do these children actually need a school pen or candy, but it has become a type of collection, like stamps. In some cases, a parent might be standing

next to a child while they beg for a school pen. The parent may not stop this behavior because they don't see anything wrong with it. After all, everyone knows that tourists give school pens. It seems that harassment that is linked to tourism is worse on the southern coast of Sri Lanka due to the large numbers of tourists.

A more serious form of harassment is sexual harassment. Although in general Sri Lanka is a very safe country and it's possible to trust most people, there have still been some cases of sexual harassment reported. The most common form of sexual harassment probably occurs on a bus. A PCV (usually female) notices that a man is standing too close to her or seems to be pretending to sleep with his hand on her knee. To the Sri Lankan man, foreign women are "easy" and have a sexy image. Again this is partly due to Western advertising and TV. Although women most often speak of harassment, PCV men experience it too. One of the most unfortunate things about the tourist industry in Sri Lanka is that the island is advertised as a good place for men to meet boys. It's possible to see older foreign men traveling with young Sri Lankan boys. Although prostitution is prohibited by law, it is not enforced very strongly and male prostitution exists. For this reason, PCV men may be approached or touched inappropriately by young men looking for money from prostitution.

Knowing How

How to react to harassment is very difficult to say, because it depends on the situation and the personality of the PCV. The situations almost always come as a surprise and leaves the PCV feeling angry and victimized. It may not be possible to stop the harassment, but there are some things you can do to help control your reaction.

Since a lot of harassment revolves around the tourist industry, it is especially important to avoid looking and acting like a tourist. If you follow the information on appropriate appearance and behavior from earlier chapters, you may significantly reduce your chances of being perceived as a tourist. But of course this is not fool-proof. No matter what, you will still be a foreigner. However if you speak in Sinhala and try to talk to your harasser on a personal level, you may be able to turn things around. For example, one day on a beach I was surrounded and harassed by small children begging for school pens. At first I was very annoyed and tried to get them to go away. When I saw that they were in no hurry to leave, I tried a different tack and asked them about themselves. They were quite talkative and we sang "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" together. In the end I went to their house for tea and they gave me some hair bands! I was ecstatically happy that the whole situation had turned around. Of course it won't always work out that way. But I feel that children bother you because they are especially interested in you and want to talk to you.

Regarding touts, you should be careful. In this case it is okay to use a very direct "no", because otherwise they will follow you with great persistence. In fact, even with a strong "no" they may continue to follow you. If you are not sure whether someone is a tout or trying to con you, then its best to be on the safe side.

Don't do anything with them. A general rule of thumb is, don't trust anyone who seeks you out. Of course there are friendly Sri Lankans you will meet on the train or bus, who might invite you for tea. These invitations are usually quite safe and show the innocent hospitality of the Sri Lankan people. But, if you are at a bus stand in a new town and suddenly find a "friend" next to you who will help you find a nice hotel, then you should be on alert.

A preventative measure you can take regarding harassment is to know your limits and to stay away from "hot" spots. For example, I found it very difficult to handle taunting children, so I stayed away from the "hot" spots, the times when they were walking in hordes before and after school. I arranged my schedule so I wouldn't be on the street at those times. Knowing your limits involves knowing when you've had enough and when you might be likely to overreact to comments. I was especially easy to anger if I had had an argument with my supervisor, or my lesson hadn't gone well that day. By being aware of my "touchiness" I made a conscious effort to block out any comments I received on the streets. Or, for example, when I went to the beach and was surrounded by touts or children who wouldn't leave me alone, I finally decided to leave. Although I was sad that they had ruined my time at the beach, I was able to avoid the very unpleasant situation of completely losing my temper.

Sexual harassment is another instance when a very direct response is appropriate. The first thing PCV women can do upon entering a bus or train, is to try to find a seat next to another woman. Also try to avoid sitting in the back of the bus, especially if there are mostly men sitting there. It seems that some Sri Lankan women prefer to stand than sit in the middle of a group of men. If you are being harassed on a crowded bus and the Sri Lankan doesn't respond to your attempts to push him away, then its best to make a scene. PC women have had success with announcing loudly, "Don't touch me." or "Leave me alone!" This is usually sufficiently embarrassing to get the man to get off the bus at the next stop, or at least leave you alone. Additionally, PCVs should "look out" for each other when traveling together. This means keeping an eye on where your PCV friend is sitting. If a PCV man notices that a PCV woman is sitting in the back of the bus among a group of men, he can ask her if she is comfortable where she is sitting. If the answer is no, and the PCV man is sitting next to a Sri Lankan woman, then it is a good idea to offer to switch places.

If PCVs have a more serious case of sexual harassment, then it is best to contact the Peace Corps office for the correct procedures. In general it is recommended that you do not go to the police because of security issues.

Activity: Choose a situation from this chapter and do a role-play. Get comments from some Sri Lankan observers.

Knowing Why

1. Why do you think tourism isn't more tightly controlled in Sri Lanka?

2. Why do you think PCVs might still get hassled even if they speak Sinhala, dress appropriately, etc....?

3. Observe in a tourist area. Describe what you see and your feelings about the experience.

4. How do you think harassment is similar or different between Sri Lanka and the U.S.?

Knowing Oneself

1. Describe a time when you felt harassed (in Sri Lanka, the U.S. or while traveling). How did you react? Why?

2. Think of a harassment situation in Sri Lanka that might really disturb you. Brainstorm strategies you could use to help manage the situation.

3. For women: Talk to three Sri Lankan women and ask them for their opinions on sexual harassment. Does it happen to them? What do they do?

4. Do you consider yourself to be a trusting person? Write one page on how you think harassment will affect that aspect of your personality.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

I hope this handbook helped you with your initial exploration of Sri Lankan culture by providing an insightful, balanced perspective. It may seem like there are many difficult adjustments ahead, and if you are new to Sri Lanka, you may feel uncomfortable with this. But the good thing is that adjustment happens with time and can be fun and exciting. One of the reasons many PCVs join Peace Corps is because they want to experience a new and different worldview. Hopefully, the majority of your experiences in Sri Lanka will be exciting, heartwarming and funny. As you continue your exploration of Sri Lankan culture, I suggest you review the "How to" and "Knowing Oneself" questions every three to six months. You may be surprised at all of the cultural information you've gained, and how your attitudes have changed. By reviewing these questions, you will have a record of your progression in "knowing" the Sri Lankan culture.

I hope as you make your own discoveries in the Sri Lankan culture, that you will find some "gems" that are unique and touching. To me, "gems" are those experiences that make Sri Lanka special and warm my heart. They are things that you can't (or rarely) find in U.S. culture. As I look back on my experience in Sri Lanka, I think of one "gem" that I remember most.

After I looked around my barren room on my last day in Sri Lanka, a friendly face appeared at the door. It was the "peanut lady" and her three children. For two years I referred to her in conversation as the peanut lady because she sold peanuts by the Galle bus stand. She worked everyday; all day and well into the night. It was very tiring work, sitting in the hot sun next to the noisy road and polluting buses. She was a poor woman whose mouth and teeth were stained red from chewing beetle. Her clothes were worn and dirty, held together in places with safety pins. She was troubled with a wracking cough. During my two-year service, I had gotten to know her quite well because she roasted the best peanuts in town. I often bought huge bags of peanuts from her so I could make my own peanut butter. Every time I stopped at her stand, she greeted me with a huge smile and friendly chatter. She lived in a poor neighborhood, and I visited her house a number of times. It was always a remarkable event with large groups of children standing in the doorway smiling at me.

As I greeted her at my house on that last day, I was surprised to see that she, as well as her children, were wearing their nicest "frocks". Clean and well-pressed, their usually unkempt hair had been carefully combed. I was touched that they had come to say good-bye. I looked quizically at the large package she offered me. "It's peanuts," she said, "so you can make peanut butter when you go home." This large package represented about four days wages for her. A lump formed in my throat and I burst into tears. Generosity from someone so poor touched me deeply.

I felt overwhelmingly sad to leave this home of mine, to say good-bye to good-hearted friends such as the peanut lady. I realized that I might never see her again or recapture the "magic" of my life in Sri Lanka. I hope that you will appreciate the "magic" in your Sri Lankan experiences. And if you happen to be in Galle, stop at the small peanut stand on the east side of the bus station and say "hi" to my good friend the peanut lady.

READINGS

Barlas, Robert and Wanasundera, Nanda P. *Culture Shock! Sri Lanka: A Guide to Customs and Etiquette.* Oregon: Graphic Arts Center Publishing Company, 1992

Disanayaka, J.B. *Say it in Sinhala.* Sri Lanka: Lakehouse Printers and Publishers Ltd., 1985

Wheeler, Tony. *Survival Guide to Sri Lanka.* California: Lonely Planet Publications, 1987

Wijetunga, W.M.K. *Sri Lanka in Transition.* Sri Lanka: Wesley Press, 1974